

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH URGES MEN AND WOMEN  
OVER AGE 50 TO GET TESTED FOR CANCER OF THE COLON AND RECTUM**

(Richmond, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health urges men and women over age 50 to get tested for cancer of the colon and rectum.

“Ninety-three percent of the cases occur in people over age 50,” said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. “Screening can find colorectal cancer early, when treatment can be very effective.”

Colorectal cancer, or cancer of the colon and rectum, is the third leading cause of cancer deaths in Virginia. Death rates in the state are highest among African-Americans. From 1996-2000, in Virginia there were 34.0 deaths per 100,000 African-American men compared to 23.8 deaths per 100,000 white men. For women during that same period, there were 27.1 deaths per 100,000 African American women compared to 17.6 for white women.

“Colorectal cancer is one cancer where regular screening clearly has benefits,” said Theresa Teekah, manager of the health department’s Cancer Control Project. “It helps in two ways: to find polyps so they can be removed before they turn into cancer, and second, to find the cancer early when it can be treated more effectively. Screening saves lives.”

Colorectal cancer starts with the growth of polyps in the colon or rectum, which are parts of the digestive system. The colon, also known as the bowel, is part of the large intestine. The rectum is the last several inches of the large intestine. One screening test involves a laboratory examination of stool samples for blood. Other common tests involve the use of a small, flexible, lighted tube to examine the lining of the rectum or colon. These screening tests can find polyps early so they can be removed before they turn into cancer and spread to other parts of the body.

The health department’s Cancer Control Project has been working with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to promote the Screen for Life Campaign, which is designed to educate men and women age 50 and older about colorectal cancer and the importance of having regular screening tests. The project recently placed advertisements on buses in Danville, Hampton/Newport News, Loudoun County, Lynchburg, Norfolk/Virginia Beach, Petersburg, Richmond and Roanoke. It has also provided grant funds to the Lenowisco Health District in Southwest Virginia to implement the Screen for Life Campaign.

(more)

Polyps and colorectal cancer do not always cause symptoms, especially at first. But sometimes symptoms do appear. They include:

- blood in your stools
- unexplained and frequent pain, aches or cramps in your stomach
- a change in bowel habits, such as narrow stools, and
- unexplained weight loss

If you have any of these symptoms, you should see your doctor. They may be caused by something else, but the only way to know for sure is to get medical care.

You can reduce your chances of getting cancer of the colon and rectum by adopting a few simple health habits, such as:

- Get screened regularly soon after turning age 50.
- Become more physically active.
- Eat less red meat and more fruits and vegetables.
- Keep your weight down.

For more information on cancer screening guidelines, visit [www.vahealth.org/cancerprevention](http://www.vahealth.org/cancerprevention).

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